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AUTHOR Nelson, Marie Wilson
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ABSTRACT

A naturalistic-design study compared the practices of "writer-teachers" (expert practitioners) who employ methods rooted in experience with traditional "teacher writers." Eight subjects were chosen from a group of 23 writers who teach below the college level. One quarter of classroom observation and taping produced an in-depth study of two expert practitioners and one traditional teacher, chosen for contrast. Results indicate that teacher-writers suffer from professional schizophrenia when traditional wisdom overrides intuitive knowledge. These teachers adopt an English Instructional Model that has three variations--The Little Professor, Traditional, or Innovative; but because these models are unrelated to how people actually write, few students improve and teachers become frustrated. If, however, the perceived risks are small enough, teachers can evolve into expert practictioners, as did one subject of the in-depth study. Expert practitioners soon discover five facts: (1) all students can learn to write; (2) learning to write occurs naturally; (3) serious attitudes and practice writing are essential; (4) writing classes must shelter writers; and (5) writers must be willing to look honestly at themselves. Although implementation will not be easy, this study indicates that the expert practitioner model is valid for both teachers and students. (JL)

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WRITERS TRAINING WRITERS--
MODELS FOR THEIR STUDENTS AND THEIR PEERS

PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE
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MARIE WILSON NELSON
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
4400 UNIVERISTY DRIVE
FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA 22030
(703) 323-3470 (O)
(703) 273-3470 (H)

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Morty: Oh, Goddamn, Jonathan, this is great here. Lock, the way you do that. It's so vulnerable, when you're stuck in the fence, and you know you're losing your power, and that she is in charge, and you say, "Hey, 11th Air Corps," and you're still trying to cling to that power and sense of command. It's wonderfully done, it's absolutely great dialogue. The whole story.

I thought it was absolutely INCREDIBLE, GREAT, ABSOLUTELY MARVELOUS. I think it's WONDERFUL, INCREDIBLY EXCITING. The writing is absolutely delightful, strong, VERY human. I JUST LOVE IT!

[Quoting from his notes on the story] "Jonathan as a leader of peers loses his power to a new kid and learns he has to share." Is that right?

Morty was an expert practitioner, a "writer training writers." His methods grew from his experience writing, and he was teaching in a middle school.

I was looking for such writers in middle and secondary schools, but below the college level, they were difficult to find. On Wednesday I drove to Atlanta to interview Morty and Barbara who said I could visit their class to look around for a day. They relied heavily on student conferences: Here Morty goes over a story with eighth-grade author Jon:

The class put down their brushes and dashed to the door. The doors opened and I jumped down the steps. I yelled Shaza-a-am and turned into Captain Marvel. I flew the rest of the way to the swings. When I got there, I climbed into my figher plane and turned into an Air Force captain. Captain Jon. I liked Jon better than Jonathan.

Morty: WONDERFUL LINE!

I reved up my plane. "Captain Jon to fighter planes," I called. "Roll call," I demanded to the rest of the kids. I was the leader. What I said they did. I was the popular person. The rest of my first grade class were the good old boys that fought by my side in the air. Or the people I saved as Captain Marvel. The roll call read off in order.

Morty: This is absolutely INCREDIBLE. It's WONDERFUL STUFF.

I had friends. I was the one that everyone liked. I was the Captain. "Ha, ha! I've shot down 22 planes today!" one of my friends said. I quickly shot down 30 planes and said, "I've shot down 30." No one ever tried to top me. I laughed, and swooped down to save a private.

Morty: This is just incredible, Jonathan. I'm not kidding. This writing is WONDERFUL. [To me] Isn't that good?

In midyear, a new girl came to our school. Susan Geiger outranked me. She was older than me, she was stronger, smarter, but most of all, she had more control over the people that were my friends. I noticed that my friends spent less time at recess

in the sky and more time with Susan. She would stand at the bottom of our hill, and the boys would run down it, and she would grab them by the wrist and swing them around like a helicopter. She was twelve years old, and we were seven.

I was losing my power. For some reason, not everyone liked me anymore. When we played kickball, I was not picked first.

Morty skipped to the part where Jon got stuck in the fence and no one helped him out.

"Hey, 11th Air Corps, your, uh, captain's stuck. Could one of you pilots give me a hand?" Some of the 11th looked over at me, but didn't do anything. They didn't get out of line.

Morty: It's a great story, okay? I think it works. I think the narrative is fantastic, the dialogue is good. You've got to correct this, okay? Oh, yeah, you <u>did</u> already. The stuff I absolutely went wild over I marked for you, and I want you to read it.

Now let me tell you something else I loved Jonathan. The punctuation is excellent, so's the spelling.

Jonathan was undeniably the worst speller in the class, perhaps in the school.

Morty: You got the highest grade I can give. After the first three pages, you got a little careless, and you need to go back, but I didn't mark them all after that. Tell me, what happened to the spelling?

Jon: I got a dictionary. I looked up every word I could find. Got my mother, asked her how to spell some, and then looked up the rest. I know when they're not right, Morty. Most of the time I can tell.

Morty: It's just diligence, then.

I talked to and observed these teaching writers, looking for connections between teaching and writing styles. Both insisted their program grew from experience, were scornful of the school tradition I stood for in their minds. I believed them expert practitioners ("I didn't learn anything about writing in school or college, but Barbara taught me a lot. The first thing was how to start"). Now Morty shares with students what he learned from her ("What you do is just start writing, and it will come. It always comes. It doesn't matter what you say first, you can always tear off the top").

Morty said that students benefitted from his and Martha's working as a team:

She seems to have more empathy in the actual writing process whereas I am more responsive in other ways. I don't know if she feels as vulnerable in her writing, for example, as I have felt with mine.

"You empathize with the students' fear of a bad response?" I asked, suspecting a connection with his lavish praise.

Morty: Exactly.

Me: You need a positive response to your own writing?

Morty: I need . . . absolute . . . [Morty paused, searching for the precise word]. . . ADORATION! [He exploded into laughter].

Me: So you do, then. You empathize with that need because . . .

Morty: [Interupting excitedly] Yes! NOW THERE YOU GO! That is a transfer from my own writing. You have hit the nail on the head!

The kind of praise given to Jonathan's story, was only one reward for writing well. And though it was reserved for the very best, Morty always raved about the good. Later he described the "writing program" he and Barbara had devised.

> We don't use any textbooks. We just teach writing naturally. You don't need special techniques to teach something people do naturally. Ours is an intuitive, artistic approach.
>
> In writing, what is important to me, what works for me—with some danger of projection—should work for most people. I trust what works for me much more than I trust what they say about teaching writing in an education textbook. Of course, if it doesn't work for someone else, I'll understand [emphasis mine].

"I can do a lot with writing because I know a lot about writing," he noted later when asked about their evident success. "I know an awful lot of good writers," he commented grinning, "but as a teacher I feel special."

Describing methods I would repeatedly observe, the Weinsteins illustrated how teaching can be shaped by experience and explained the principles they had gradually come to believe. Strong feelings lead to strong writing, they told me, and memory is a primary source:

> Now the things that I learned writing my novel I apply here in my own teaching—things like "write what pushes." That's almost controlled my whole novel now. There are principles I think are universal in writing. Writing what pushes is one of them. If you feel strongly about it, and you allow it to flow, then it'll come out good [emphasis mine].
>
> I've learned from writing that memory is a primary source and that invention comes powerfully when it comes from memory. In my novel, I use my experience being one of two Jewish kids on a Southern Baptist-type campus to set up a confrontation between two guys, but it all grows from the memory, starting with reality and then elaborating on it. That is what gives the confrontation, which is total invention, its force.

Barbara and Morty taught more than creative writing; they worked hard on expository writing as well. But though the contexts they created for each mode were very different, the principles that guided their instruction were alike. And the term they used—"writing"—was the same for both. Essay writing, taught through the court system, included many activities:

> We teach a course called Essay Writing as a part of the pre-law sequence [American Histroy, Federal Constitution, Class Constitution, and Essay Writing] which seventh graders take to prepare for the bar exam. We teach them how to write questions for their tests in those courses and also legal briefs [opening statements, lines of questioning, closing statements] for court. At the end of the essay-writing course we pull some "real" court cases from the dockets and they practice a few dry runs. It's good experience for when they get to be lawyers, a prerequisite for running for office.
>
> Now, here's how they <u>really</u> learn the essay. After they pass the course and bar exam, they go to court to prove that Tom committed the crime of misuse of class property by taking an encyclopedia out for three days and keeping it in his cubby where nobody could find it. When they've written their two-page, page-and-a-half, three-page essay interpreting the law against that and proving that Tom in fact is guilty, then they present it in court.
>
> We've reduced that now. We've decided the essay is really too abstract for most seventh-grade children to handle so we've reduced the requirements to a paragraph. But with some kids it'll go five pages.

Before I left, Barbara showed me a speech in which she had recently explained to teachers their strong beliefs. This is how she describes the the essay in the speech:

> And the essay, well, the essay is a necessary form of writing. It is what generally happens in school. It is a bridge that must be crossed. But finally it, too, must merge into a creative form if it is to be read, if it is to last. The student who has written a beautiful story and is not limitied in his ability to think abstractly can write a beautiful essay with practice. He can do this because he has made an essential link with himself and writing and had found himself writing thoughts he did not know he could express. <u>Writing does not loom as a formidable chore for the student who had entered the world of creative writing and knows, in the sense of one who can produce a story worthy of applause, that he is a writer</u>[emphasis mine].

Writing pervaded all activity in the Weinstein class. In addition to the class <u>Constitution</u> and <u>Hidden Places</u>, the book of stories published by the students every year, I saw the political system reward with prestige and power those who gave persuasive speeches or sponsored the best bills. Here was a world of real writing, where students wrote for the same reasons other writers write: to get published—in <u>Hidden Places</u>; to gain power—in their Congress and their courts; and to gain prestige—in the eyes of their teachers and peers. Barbara and Morty, who

taught writing as they knew it, ran a class where writing was never arhetorical, was never an end in itself, and where real-world rewards accrued to any who wrote well.

Expert practitioners are attractive figures. Confident, empathetic, optimistic, successful, and serious about their work, they embody the accomplishment that is every teacher's goal, and such teaching inspires competence, confidence, empathy, satisfaction, and diligence in students as well. Writers training writers know they are good teachers, and their students' progress strengthens that belief, rapidly reinforcing the roles such writers play—of editor, fellow-writer, artist training artists, master to apprentices, and mentor to learners in the field. Their work is intuitive more than rational, creative more than methodical, artistic not scientific, inductive not deductive, and discovery-oriented rather than rigidly structured.

Valuing "honest writing" above all, such teachers reward students for the risks that honest work entails. They create supportive writing communities and share their own experience to develop student trust, rewarding the behaviors that lead to competence. And because writing can create its own rewards, writers training writers build contexts where real-world motivations, real-world genres and forms, produce the kinds of payoffs their real-world students desire.

The Assumptions of This Study

Unlike instructors of other arts, writing teachers in secondary schools have seldom been writers themselves; most are trained in the appreciation, not the production, of literature (Brown, 1921; Fennell, 1975; Murray, 1978b). As a result, there is often a mismatch between their teaching and how writers write (Hearn, 1920; Mearns, 1929; Murray, 1978a). Recently, studies of student writing processes (Emig, 1971; Beach, 1976; Sommers, 1978; Perl, 1979; Pianko, 1979) have documented the detrimental influence of typical school instruction. And analyses of both contemporary writing (Christensen, 1967; Ellis, 1967; Braddock, 1974) and professional and academic writers' approaches (Emig, 1971; Lowenthal & Wason, 1977; Sheed, 1958) confirm that typical textbook pronouncements bear little relation to the writing writers do.

On the assumption, therefore, that other things being equal, writers should be better teachers of writing than teachers who don't write, I examined the teaching of experienced writers at the middle and secondary levels with the hope of informing the teaching of writing in the schools.

The Pyramid Design and Progressive Focusing

When I came to this project as a long-time teacher and writer, I had known many writers who teach. As some were teaching traditionally and I felt I could learn few answers from them, I adapted the pyramid design of Donald Graves (1975) for my own purposes. Instead of gathering more and more information on progressively fewer (preselected) people in order to generalize back to the broader base, I used a similar, three-phase design for the opposite purpose—to make at each level finer discriminations, to eliminate the writers whose teaching was least experienced based. My goal was to identify expert practitioners—I now call them "writer-teachers"—in whose classrooms to generate hunches about how writing is learned. At the time I wasn't interested in accounting for how all writers teach; I wanted to tease out, from a broad base of teaching behaviors, methods rooted in experience.

During naturalistic studies, however, the significance of variables emerges, so I've been able to specify factors keeping many writers from teaching what they know, causing them to model their teaching after non-writers, and determining their failure or success. As a result, my study accomplished more than I expected. This report is based on the in-process analysis of all the data I collected, on a fine-grained analysis of Phases I and II, and on a close reading of the first 100 pages of the first in-depth study transcripts. In it I categorize teaching writers, contrast the effectiveness of "teacher-writers" with that of "writer-teachers" (expert practitioners), provide illustrative vignettes of several writers who teach, and sketch a still emerging theory to account for teacher change.

Overview

I began by interviewing 23 experienced writers to discover which ones' teaching reflected experience. Then I observed, for a day or so each, the eight I tentatively selected. Eventually I settled on three for in-depth study. Barbara and Morty were expert practitioners, a husband-and-wife team teaching English and social studies to 30 seventh and eighth graders in a private Atlanta school. My third choice, department coordinator at a large, comprehensive high school in a small Georgia town, illustrates the open-endedness of naturalistic designs. Because my contacts with 50 or more writers in two states uncovered no others I felt (at that time) were expert practitioners, I began to seek the significance of something I already knew—that not all writers teach like writers. When I chose her, I knew Cassandra was not an expert practitioner. I included her as a contrast.

My plan to spend two or three days a week for one academic quarter in each classroom I chose was less critical in Barbara and Morty's class where activities were regularly repeated, but in Cassandra's it let me document changes sweeping all her courses. The complementary nature of the two contexts strongly influenced my choice, for Cassandra's typical public school situation contrasted sharply to the near ideal conditions at the Hilltop School. These contrasts, inherent in my broad-based design, let a comprehensive framework emerge, provided its explanatory power, and extended the scope and significance of the study.

In-Depth Studies

Barbara and Morty had great freedom at the Hilltop School. They taught writing as they wished, taught grammar as little as they wished, and had contact with each student about four hours a day. They also taught students for two years, experienced writers returning to initiate beginners every fall. Among students' professional-class parents, support for their writing program was strong. Evolving through seven and a half years of team teaching, it had been had been polished by classroom experience and refined by their dual perspective.

Barbara and Morty enjoyed excellent teaching conditions—autonomy, continuity, a small group of 30 students, and a compatible teammate to share responsibility. For this reason their

classroom was ideal for studying the teaching and learning of writing. There I might expect to see the best of what teachers were doing and the best of student work as well. If writing can be taught, or rather if writing can be learned, surely it could happen in this setting.

Cassandra's situation complemented Morty's and Barbara's neatly. She taught a variety of ages, ability levels, and writing courses. In addition to her duties as department coordinator, she taught four writing classes with 121 students the quarter I observed, and except for one essay class of the 30 "second smartest" tenth graders in the school, all were open to tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students alike. Before Cassandra became department coordinator, the goals of composition teaching at County High had been "preparation for college" and "grammar," and parents in the community had acted satisfied.

Cassandra's case also differed in that I observed her teaching in its most rapidly evolving phase. Though she planned to develop a creative writing course in the fall, when she heard I might observe she offered it in the spring, and from the first day it became "a discovery." Not only did I observe the evolution of Creative Writing, therefore, I documented changes, resulting from her new insights, in her other courses as well. Two weeks after beginning an experientially based creative-writing course (even teacher-writers teach "creative writing" from experience), Cassandra rejected the formulas dominating her essay course for years to teach that class experientially too. The contrast between Creative Writing and the traditional essay course caused her to confront her assumptions and their inconsistencies. Seeing herself as a fiction writer (though she was writing graduate papers and publishing articles based on them), Cassandra had missed the connection between her writing and the essay course. I was lucky be present when she discovered it.

Of course my presence and stated purpose—finding correspondences—may have heightened Cassandra's awareness by letting her see her teaching through my eyes; rather than confounding this analysis, however, that possibility could only confirm a major finding—that awareness is a factor in how and what writers teach and in whether or not they change. At any rate, I observed Cassandra's metamorphosis into an "experienced practitioner" and the

changes in methods, in content of instruction, in attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and values, and in classroom success and professional reputation that accompanied her new insights. And since the observations ended, in May of 1979, I've continued to follow refinements in her perspective.

Immediately after locating Barbara and Morty, I began observing their classroom, openly adopting a limited participant-observer stance. Though my actions varied from this research site to the other, due to differences in numbers of students and in ways of structuring time, a single principle governed my interactions throughout. I interacted to the extent students and teachers drew me in. (When Hilltop students asked for help with stories, I helped them as I help my own. After agreeing to talk in Cassandra's creative-writing class about "How I Write a Poem," spontaneous contacts with her students increased.) Outside of class, however, I never hesitated to ask questions about the research.

I observed at the Hilltop School three days a week Winter Quarter where I saw often all the writing activities Barbara and Morty had planned. In fact, I saw almost every writing-related session these writer-teachers held except for some individual conferences. As I would later do in Cassandra's classes, I taped everything I saw, and asked the teachers to tape some sessions I missed. Though I spent only two days a week in Cassandra's classes, beginning with Week 3 we taped every class she taught Spring Quarter including two sections of basic writing, the advanced essay course, and one creative writing group a day. In all, our efforts produced a variety of information (see Table 1).

How Writers Teach—The Choice of Identity Models

From my analysis of Phases I and II and from an overview of the in-depth study data, I have pieced together a picture of what writers do when they teach. In addition to revealing how they pass on writing know-how, this analysis explains why some writers' teaching conflicts with what they know. It is now clear that one key factor—the role model with which the 23 writers identified—influenced their teaching more predictably than any other. In fact, it became the organizing principle in the framework that emerged (see Figure 1). At some point, writers who teach chose among conflicting styles, values, and approaches; and their choice not

Table 1
Information-Gathering Techniques Typical of the
Three In-Depth Studies

1. Formal interviews and extensive spontaneous conversations about writing and the teaching or learning of writing with teachers and students

2. Classroom observations and interactions
   a. Barbara and Morty—three days a week for one quarter
   b. Cassandra—two days a week for one quarter

3. Extensive transcriptions of taped classroom observations and interactions with teachers and students

4. Transcriptions of classes taped when I was not present
   a. Barbara and Morty—4 or 5 hours of instruction
   b. Cassandra—all classes I did not observe beginning the third week of the quarter

5. Interviews with and limited observations of other teachers influenced by the three writers
   a. Barbara and Morty—Bill
   b. Cassandra—James and Claudia

6. Document analysis
   a. Teachers' journals
   b. Student writing, both in-process pieces and finished products
   c. Teachers' writing and their publications about teaching writing
   d. Articles published about Morty's and Barbara's writing program in the Atlanta Constitution, about Cassandra's in the County News
   e. Student publications and contest entries

7. Continuing interactions with writers after the observation period

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only determines both how and what they teach and the success they then experience but their professional self concepts and their pleasure in their work.

Professionally Split Personalities—Three English Instructional Models

Most writers adopted an English instructional model, and three variations of this role have emerged. One evolves from the model many college teachers emulate—"the Little Professor" as poet and fiction-writer Tom[1], an expert practitioner on leave from high-school teaching,

[1]Though Tom was not available for in-depth study, he played an important role in my research. He informed my expectations about expert-practitiones' perspectives before the study began and served as a comparison case as it drew to a close. I began with exploratory, open-ended questions as I did in the other interviews. While we talked, my questions became more confirmatory as I checked out the tenets of my emergent analysis. Tom's case both confirmed and refined my hypotheses about expert practitioners and about the process of teacher change.

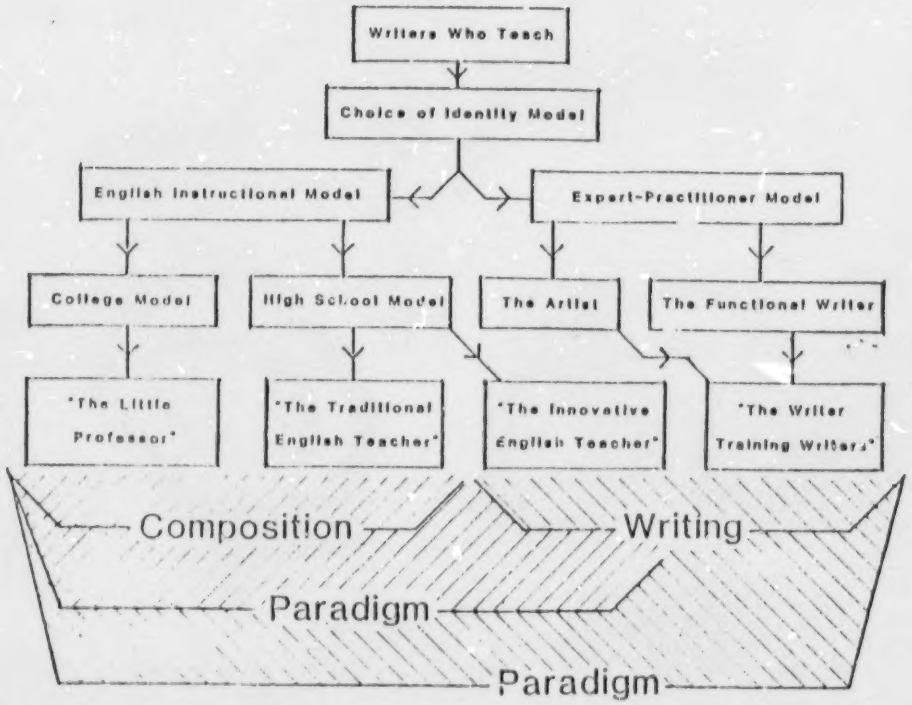

Figure 1. Relative influence of the two paradigms on the identity models.

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mockingly entitled the teacher he used to be. The other two evolve from roles that high-school teachers play—the Traditional and the Innovative English Teachers.

Few writers see themselves as "Writers Training Writers"—the name Tom gives the expert-practitioner stance. The reasons are complex. "Teacher-writers" have an experientially grounded but sometimes unarticulated awareness of writing as a process of discovery. They feel that form and meaning emerge together, often in a flash of insight rather than from conscious plans. They also agree that the most critical conditions for writers are psychological ones. In the classroom, however, another body of assumptions—the traditional wisdom of "composition" teaching that they uncritically accept—tends to override intuitive

knowledge. Depending on which of the three instructional model they adopt, the result is a more or less product-oriented focus on preventive/corrective teaching reinforced by pressure to prepare some students for college and tests, to teach others basic skills. Due to rigid conceptions of what English teachers "should do," teacher-writers teach little writing as they know it; in effect, they exhibit a split professional personality which leads to much frustration and few desired results. Because such teaching is unrelated to how people write, few students improve, and teacher-writers learn "from experience" that writers are born, not made. The frustration and elitism their "schizophrenia" produces lowers expectations for themselves and for most students. As it also reduces self-esteem, some leave the classroom as a result. The following vignette, selected from many on "writer-schizophrenics," illustrates these themes.

Marty—a burned-out case. December 28, 1979

Dear____,

> Please excuse my procrastination, but I have had a difficult time coming to a decision about your project. . . . Quite frankly, I have some very poor classes this year, and I have decided not to continue to punish myself and them by concentrating on the writing. Instead, I plan to stick with the grammar, and I don't think grammar classes were what you had in mind. The classes are such that I'm giving serious consideration to terminating my teaching here [emphasis mine].
>
> With these and other things in mind, I am again concentrating on my own writing as a possible livelihood should this year in school be my last.

Though I wasn't suprised when the reclusive Marty refused me access to his class, the signs of burnout in his letter took me by surprise. I had driven to his home, a small unmodernized farmhouse in a one-pay-phone town, after a friend discovered him at an in-service session on writing. "That's what I've been telling them all this time," Marty had exclaimed, dragging my friend toward his class; "I want them to hear it from you, too." In our interview Marty returned to the in-service topic—fluency—of his own accord.

> I do some brainstorming to get fullness and length. The first thing I teach is never to sit and think, just write. The purpose of that is they've always been taught to get it all together in their heads, to get it all straightened out first, and I just don't think you can write very well that way, because, . . . well, because I can't hold all those things in my head myself [emphasis mine].

Marty's teaching reflected his experience writing and, like expert practitioners', was in part intuitive. "The classes I teach tend to bounce around a lot," he told me.

> I'll come in one day with prepositions on my mind, and some kid comes in with prejudice on his. So the prepositions go out the window and the prejudice comes in. . . It's very easy to work around those topics because you can get them to write about it.

Marty had students write about personal topics. "That's where the writing comes from," he said of his students and himself. His own writing drew heavily on his past—people he loved, fears and insecurities, family stories of childhood. Naturally applying this experience, Marty had students write about their worries, their fears, and the people affecting their lives. And he tried to share the therapeutic function of writing: "It's like seeing your analyst. That's why I <u>like</u> teaching; you can mend lives with it."

Marty valued writing where people show themselves honestly, facing the flaws within; and he knew both he and his writing grew when he did that himself. He told of having faced his prejudice toward a student, working through his hatred on the page.

> I got really mad at a student once. I told him he could just take his free lunch and . . . and I listed it all! I had to apologize to him later. What had brought it on that day was that he was doing exactly what my step-father and all the men I grew up listening to said a black person was supposed to do—he was being a "nigger."
>
> I was so mad, and I told him so! And I was sick all night with the hatred, but it came out in the writing, and <u>it was a process of growing. Then, as you would have expected, the writing expanded a whole lot. Being a writer, you see, is facing those kinds of things in yourself</u> [emphasis mine].

Marty's words foreshadowed a theory, held by all experienced expert practitioners I studied, about the emotional component of learning to write.

Like many writers Marty graded leniently, reading mostly for interest, responding to content more than form. Because he understood how writers feel, he never complained the time he asked students to pick their best of eight papers only to end up reading <u>all</u> their papers when they couldn't judge them alone. Like him, they couldn't spot their own best work.

Many of Marty's words sounded like an expert practitioner to me, but, I hadn't learned to see the warning signs. Though he was teaching grammar two days out of five, it was partly to "structure his classes," partly to help <u>him</u> understand how he intuitively wrote, and partly

because "any book a publisher had spent so much money on couldn't be all bad." It was this last unquestioning acceptance of traditional content that emerged as a symptom of "schizophrenia." Except for that warning, I was unprepared for the bitterness—"I have decided not to continue to punish myself and them by concentrating on writing"—of his letter. From "liking" teaching writing because it could mend lives to feeling he punished himself and others was a dramatic shift.

Later, rereading that letter. I recognized elitism as another symptom: Marty thought the students in his poor, rural county caused his frustration and failure teaching writing (expert practitioners, by contrast, believe "all students can write"). Actually, both this attitude and his frustration resulted from the incompatibility between how he taught and how he wrote. I glanced back through the pages of the interview—

> They've always been taught to get it all together in their heads, to get it all straightened out first, and I just don't think you can write very well that way, because, . . . well, because I can't hold all of those things in my head myself.

—and thought of the irony that though Marty was first to state the cause of writers' failure, he himself had been caught in the the paradigm trap.

Figure 1 illustrates the influence of the paradigms on the identity models. The two more traditional ones—the little professor and the tradiional English teacher—have much in common; both accept "composition" priorities—preparing students for college, atomistic teaching of "the basics," and many preventive or corrective measures debunked by experience and research. In fact, that acceptance dominates their teaching though the traditional teacher has adapted to students maturity levels. Characteristic of both is an analytical, academic approach. Though both may supplement instruction by providing creative outlets or sharing their own experience—reading a chapter from their novel, "digressing" about how they get ideas, sharing their passion for literature and their favorite authors or forms—they do so less and less as their students decrease in ability. These writers draw their content and methods not from the writing they know but from their school experience and from the textbooks they use (I found little influence of professional education courses on them). Teacher-writers are

also influenced by colleagues and by the expectations, real or imagined, of administrators for whom they work. Katie illustrates the traditional teacher.

Katie—a "multiple-personality schizophrenic".

> December 5, 1979:
> We write all year, mostly paragraphs and essays. I spent the past six weeks on expository skills, and I'll continue to do that throughout the year. We read Huck Finn, and I assign three paragraphs on three topics. Then we do a paper on The Great Gatsby in which I show them how to expand an idea. They should have one paragraph of introduction, one of conclusion, and a body made up of three paragraphs. In the next paper I emphasize focusing rather than expansion. I want to prepare them for whatever a college teacher might ask for [emphasis mine].

Katie taught all levels, she reported, except the slowest group.

Earlier that fall I attended a writers' workshop to look for teaching writers but also because Susan Ludvigson was leading the poetry group. Susan gave me Katie's name right off. She was "a talented poet," said Susan, teaching in a small town near the North Carolina line. The first five poems Katie sent off were accepted by the Davidson Miscellany and had won the Davidson Prize. Soon after, Katie had jetted off to give readings at colleges in the northeast. A few days after the workshop I called and arranged an interview:

> Creative writing? Some of the paragraphs we do are sort of like that. . . . We study transitions, you know—describe a scene, lead the reader from one point, around the scene, and back to the beginning. I don't have them write stories or anything like that. If I had a Creative Writing class, I would do that, but I feel so compelled to do all those other things that I'm going to be held responsible for [emphasis mine].

"Another wild-goose chase," I thought. Katie was teaching straight composition and too little of that to make observing worth my while. Then she made a surprising statement—"I feel I have a very successful unit teaching poetry"—illustrating that writers teach best the literature they write. "We begin with the images—metaphors and similes and such. Then we get into writing poems." After discussion, Katie gave a "final experience reading."

> The main thing you can do to a poem is experience it. Marianne Moore says a poem should make the hair rise on the back of your neck, and when it does that you have experienced it. So while I read it, they are to keep the whole thing in mind, and we never say anything about it again. It's that important.

Katie saw to it that students experienced poetry as well as analyzing it.

Because reading the poets she loved helped her find inspiration, Katie used poems by her favorite authors—Ferlinghetti, Wilbur, Dickey, Jarrell, and Updike—as stimuli for student work. She also used her own.

> We read Ferlinghetti's poem "Fortune," about the first loss of innocence, running naked under the fire hoses in the street. Then we discuss those times in our own lives—the ones when you know that from there on out it'll never be the same again. When we are ready, we write poems about it.

Like Marty, Katie knew good writing grew from strongly felt experience, and because she found ideas for poems by reading the poets she loved, she created similar experiences for her students, interacting with them for the poetry unit only in a fellow-writer role. "I like using samples," she repeated; "it helps them be concrete instead of philosophical. One poem that regularly leads to excellent poetry is Dickey's 'The Last Time I Saw Donald Armstrong.'"

> After we "experience it, I have them write a poem begining "The last time I saw_____." They usually write about people that they love. I have some very good examples I'll give you if you like.

Studying a class set of student poems later, I was moved by many and impressed by their honesty and voice. They were also sophisticated in form.

"At this point the students don't know I write," Katie went on, "but by the end of the year they'll know. It gives me the right to tell them about writing." Like other writers, Katie found students took her seriously once they knew she wrote.

> Since I am a writer myself, the main thing I teach about poetry is that it is something that should be respected and appreciated. The first year I taught I was so afraid. I put off and put off the poetry unit. I wanted so much for them to receive poetry with appreciation, without hostility [emphasis mine].

Katie was intense about poetry, and felt students should be serious too. Teaching attitudes was part of teaching writing, her behavior said.

> Now I give my students a pep talk at the beginning of the unit. I tell them, "If you don't like it, you better not let me know. "I don't allow any derogatory remarks! Everyone is not expected to like it, but I do expect them to respect the others who pull out poetry and read and read and read. All they have to do is accept it as a valuable part of life or understand others who do [emphasis mine].

Katie spoke with conviction, but I wondered if her dictatorial attempts to make her classroom safe for poets and poetry lovers could work? They flew in the face of contemporary

theory about what teaching ought to be. Katie began to sound successful, however, when she relaxed and laughed: "And I mean I have some of the worst hoodlums in the world just fall in love with it!" Katie intuitively modeled the attitudes she wanted students to acquire: POETRY IS IMPORTANT. That was a basic assumption in her class. She was trying to protect her own feelings because poetry meant so much.

> If they ever want to say they don't like something, they have to give their reasons using literary terms. Poetry is so important to me, that's the only way I can deal with teaching it. That's why I talk to them before.

Katie's poetry teaching also reflected her experience by integrating the reading and writing of poems. Reading had been central in her development, and her teaching reflected that, too.

> I knew a long time ago that I wanted to be a poet, but I've only been writing for a couple of years. Though I wanted to be a writer in college, I wasn't ready then; I hadn't read enough. So I spent the next few years just reading modern poetry. I read everything I could get my hands on. Eight years later I decided the time had come.

In Katie I discovered "multiple-personality schizophrenia." All year long Katie the teacher taught essay formulas to students who didn't know she wrote; at the end of the year, after covering what she felt responsible for, Katie the poet came out of hiding. No longer did students read classics traditional to their grade; Katie taught a "miscellaneous unit" on the poets she loved. No longer was the aim of literary study the analysis of accepted works; "exper- ience" with literature had become the goal. And in Katie's poetry unit students used no more formulas or topics assigned them from the reading; they marshalled their experience for a focused creative response. Katie's goals for students had shifted from analysis and content acquisition to experience, appreciation, and self-expression; from critical analysis of famous works to producing literature themselves. And her own attiitude had shifted from obligation to awe. Not only did Katie teach "expository skills" and "creative writing" differently, she modeled different attitudes associated with the two, and her writer and teacher "personalities" seemed unaware of each other.

It was a delightful evening. Katie ended the interview after a twenty-minute chat, and led our talk to her favorite topic when she discovered I wrote. She was more interested in my

poetry than my study, and I never got her to talk about school again though I scheduled a second interview. Except for the poetry unit, school and writing appeared dissociated in Katie's mind.

Katie's unawarenesss of her split behavior protected her from the ambivalence of most teacher-writers. More aware "pragmatic schizophrenics" like Davis, another writer in the study, rejected the composition-paradigm's validity but felt pressure to prepare students for college and the S.A.T. Davis was an innovative teacher.

> "I'm on their side. 'We're together in this against the world, in this crazy thing. I'll show you how to beat the system,' [I say]. That way I can teach it and not feel too bad because they know my attitude. It makes writing class a drag when you have to get into all of that, but you have to do it sometimes, out of necessity" [emphasis mine].

Because he still accepted those composition values, Davis would consciously pick and choose. He played the whole range of teaching models, donning a suit and tie to play "Professor Chuck" and teach "the Five-Paragraph Theme according to Dobbs Hall 101" or modeling after a favorite writing teacher in the expert-practitioner role. It was Katie's extreme lack of awareness that protected her from ambivalence and frustration while leading her to alternate between incompatible models—the traditional English teacher and a (limited) expert-practitioner role—each in unadulterated form.

Teachers adopting an innovative teacher role differ from other instructional types. While much of what they do is writing based, it springs more from the process-aware model of English Education courses than from experience. Unlike that of expert practitioners ("It's amazing! It's revolutionary! And they just pick it up naturally, we don't teach it directly"—Morty), their teaching is process-oriented more than process-generated. Innovative teachers preteach "the writing process." Many have read Murray, or Macrorie; they may even be familiar with research. But because they've never faced their contradictory logic—because they've retained some "composition" goals—they mix the methods and content of the two paradigms. I also found an intrusion of traditional content and methods in even the most innovative approach.

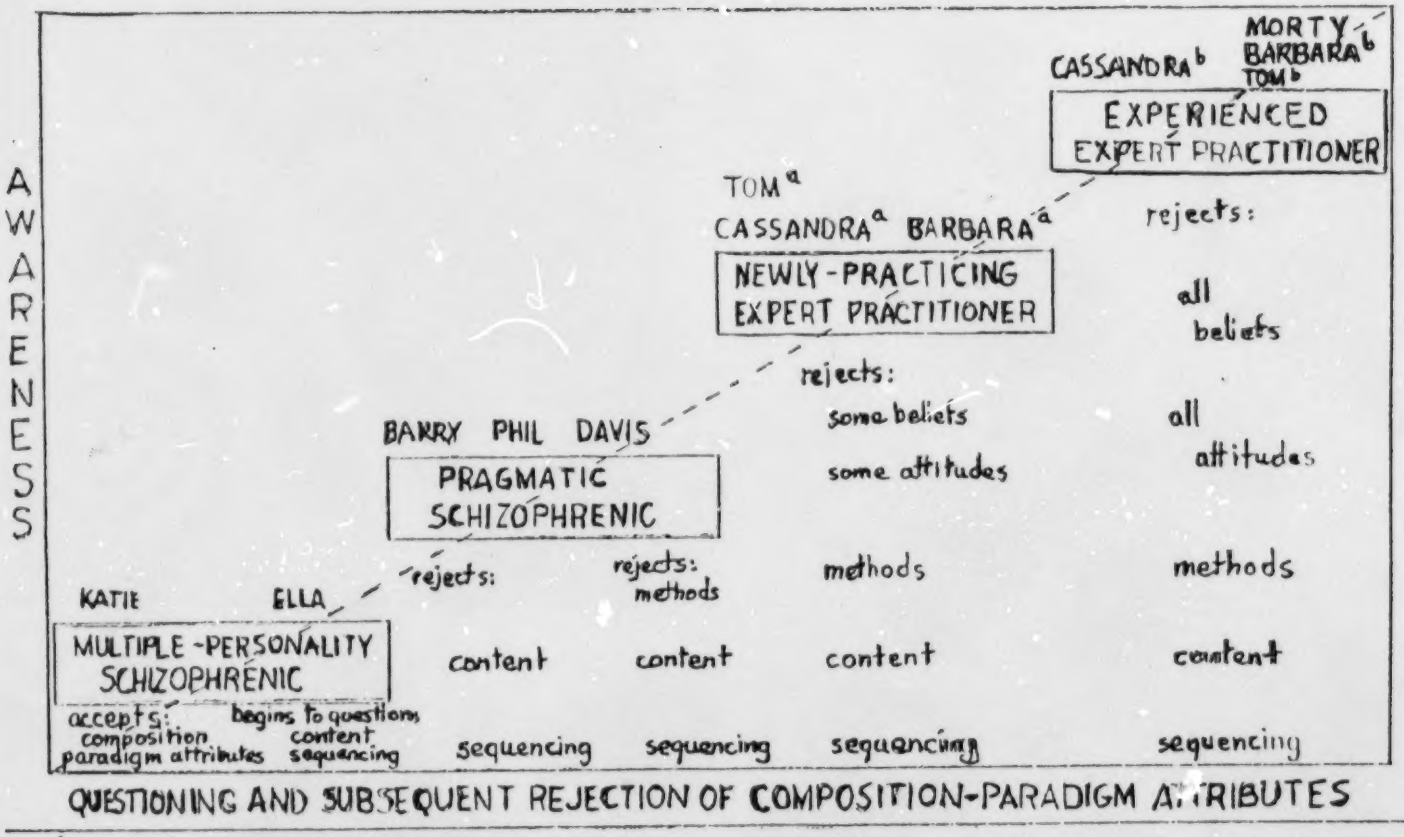
Bridging the paradigm gap. Though most teachers cling to the composition values, afraid to take what falsely seems to them a tremendous risk, when teacher-writers confront the faulty logic of their behavior and are given enough support, they may leap suddenly into the center of the writer-training-writers approach. This phenomenon of paradigm-hopping is the initial step in the Acquisition and Evolution of the Expert-Practitioner Stance, a major component in the still emerging analysis of my ethnographic study of Cassandra.

While frustration prompts unproductive model-hopping within the composition paradigm, coupled with increased awareness and support, it launches a paradigm shift; both Cassandra and Tom attribute their willingness to try new approaches to frustration teaching "composition." As both were encouraged (by professors) to rely on experience, and because they had dependable support, they were able to make the shift. Whenever the writers of this study adopted a beginning practitioner stance, support was a condition helping them take that "risk."

"Figure 3 characterizes illustrative writers along a continuum—their level of awareness that the composition paradigm is false. Rejecting most of its attributes (content, methods, sequencing, beliefs, values, and attitudes, but particularly the goals of preparing students for college and of teaching "the basics" to them) allows beginning expert practitioners to try the practitioner stance; and at that point their evolution begins. As Cassandra illustrates and as Barbara and Morty state, the "amazing" writing their students produce—("It's revolutionary . . .") brings about a final rejection—of elitist attitudes:

> When you first start teaching, a few kids give you a few good things so you think at first that this is your "writing element," this is the percentage of writers in your class. You do that, you know. But when you see that everybody can do it, that you aren't pushing them up against something they can't do, you'll go ahead and push them" [Barbara, emphasis mine].

The decision, now irreversible, is immediately reinforced by increasing professional recognition, growing self-confidence as teachers, and reduced frustration and stress.



[a]Early in career as expert practitioner

[b]Later in career as expert practitioner

Figure 3. Classification of writers along increasing awareness of their simultaneous acceptance of logically incompatible paradigms and by their subsequent rejection of Composition-Paradigm attributes.

Writers' evolution into experienced practitioners is characterized by smoothness, continuity, perfectability, and growth. And they do not leave the category once committing to it. Unlike the little professor model (which some adopt early in their careers only to leave in time), and unlike the traditional and innovative models (which accommodate a lot of model-hopping back and forth), writers adopting a practitioner stance perceive no dissonance. They submit instead to the excitement of "the discovery process" as Cassandra dubbed the teaching that followed when she rejected her innovative approach.

Adapting to an emerging theory. Because of the match between their teaching and how people write, newly practicing writer-teachers see improvement in all students, regardless of ability. Soon they become convinced that

1.) All students can learn to write, that written competence, like spoken competence, is unrelated to I.Q..

> Creativity in writing is spread so widely throughout humanity that were all of it to be revealed to us, we would have to redefine what talent means. . . . There is hardly anyone in this room, in this city, in this state, who could not write a warm, moving, insightful story with properties of structure and language that would shock us with their originality and aptness. . . . Is writing a part of our equipment? I believe that it is [Barbara, emphasis mine].

> Barbara and I believe that all students, we believe that almost every kid, can learn to write with the sophistication of a junior high short-story teller. In other words, if Fitzgerald were here in our class, we believe he'd be a fairly good writer, you know? Or maybe a real good one. We believe that kids can all write like artists, that any kid can write with artistic sensibility—GOOD, in other words [Morty, emphasis mine].

> One other principle we've discovered—and I think we need to shout it out so we don't forget it—is that there's no correlation at all between academics and good writing. Sometimes we'll find that a kid who's real bright has an extra flair with language, and that'll come through in their speeches or stories. But a really good story doesn't have to have that really good language [Morty, emphasis mine].

Writer-teachers also come to have confidence that

2.) Learning to write occurs naturally, that no special "techniques" are needed to help students learn.

> Nobody needs to impose a structure on something that happens naturally [Morty].

> So I think there is no one way they pick it up, mostly by osmosis and assimilating it all, mostly by what's read in the first Creative Writing group in the fall. I mean, these kids come back after the summer, they're raring to go! The new kids pick it up from them [Morty].

> Barbara and I are amazed at the standards of writing—and they get better every year [Morty].

In addition, experienced expert practitioners (and many teacher writers) agree that at least three conditions are necessary for writing well.

3.) Serious attitudes and practice writing must pervade the writing community:

> Take Elsa—it's incredible how her writing has improved. She works really, really hard. . . . She's written an easy eighteen stories this year [by February], and some of those are 30, 40 pages long [Morty].
>
> I'm serious about my writing, and I'm serious—and Barbara's serious—about the children's writing. . . . We want the writing to be serious too [Morty].
>
> If a kid doesn't know how to act in this classroom, an upperclassman tells him real fast. And very quickly what they have to learn is that the kids in here are serious [Morty].

4.) A writing class must function as a sheltering community of writers where students write "honestly" [Cassandra], can "get vulnerable" enough to take the "emotional risks" which lead to "breakthroughs" [Barbara], can "run naked across the page" [Morty].

> You're welcome to come over for a day to talk and look around, but that's the absolute limit. We've got a good thing going in our classroom, and we can't afford to mess it up. It's too delicate, too fragile. That's why we get the writing [Morty].

5.) Writers must be willing to look honestly at themselves and face what they find within; When they do they achieve a "breakthrough [Barbara], "exploding all over the page" [Morty].

> It's as if the fuller the emotional development of the kid, the better a writer he is [Barbara].
>
> That's the only way I see that they can grow as writers [Barbara].

I am reminded of Marty's words:

> I was sick all night with the hatred, but it came out in the writing, and it was a process of growing. Then, as you would have expected, the writing expanded a whole lot. Being a writer, you see, is facing those kinds of things in yourself [emphasis mine].

These tenets underlie a more fully developed theory of teaching and learning writing that experienced practitioners used to justify their teaching and toward which other writers often moved. And it is the repeated emergence of this theory, grounded in experience and refined in classroom "labs," that accounts for the evolution of writer-teachers toward an experienced-practitioner stance. Some sort of justification for teaching characterized all 23 writers, and

expert practitioners Cassandra and Morty claimed the reasons behind their methods were as or more important than their speciefic activities. But the difference between these writer-teachers and other writers who teach is that they justify methods by how writers write and learn to write and by whether or not their students are ready for what they ask them to do. By contrast, teachers-writers either 1) succumb to pressures "compelling" them to teach as they do not write or 2) fail to examine the implications of how they teach and why.

Writers training writers—the expert-practitioners. In contrast to writers adopting one of the three instructional models, those adopting an expert-practitioner stance see themselves as "writers training writers, as passing on the know-how of their trade. Poets, journalists, fiction writers, and essayists—all teach writing as they experience it and reject traditional approaches. My first phone call to Morty in Atlanta illustrates this point.

"I'm doing a study of writers teaching composition," I explained. "I want to know what you and Barbara do to get such stories from your kids." His answer startled me.

"Well, actually, you see, uh . . . we don't . . . uh, we don't teach any composition." Morty paused, and my hopes sank. I'd thought after reading a book of stories published by his and Barbara's class that I had found the kind of writers I was seeking. "But our kids do a helluva lot of writing," he added, and for the first time I recognized a distiction many writers had made.

Theorists distinguish between composition and composing, between products and processes. Morty made that distinction from a writer's point of view: We don't teach any composition, but our kids do a helluva lot of writing. Later, combing through transcripts, I found writer after schizophrenic writer ambushed by that distinction. For those who didn't reject "composition," as Morty and Barbara did, pressure to teach it rather than "writing" undermined success. For the writers in this study, whichever role they adopt, "writing" is simply writing; "composition" is something else. But such is the power of the instructional model that unless writers consciously reject it, none escape its trap.

That first long-distance telephone conversation marked a turning point in the study. Morty's words convinced me writer-teachers exist: "I teach it the way I learned it, not the way I was taught! And that goes for Barbara too." He also gave me names—"composition" and "writing"—for the simultaneously accepted patterns of behavior and belief that induce "schizophrenia."

The distinction between process-generated and process-oriented, between process-shaped and process-shaping instruction, explains the face validity of an assumption this study rests on--that writers should be better teachers of writing than the best teachers who don't write. Experienced writers' ability to give intuitively helpful responses gives them an advantage less experienced writers cannot match. All 23 writers I interviewed described process-generated teaching; all drew on experience to a greater or lesser extent. But for experienced practitioners, method springs first from experience. They teach toward, not from, external forms; move from, not toward, internal ones. Such teaching shows up in various ways; the following are illustrative:

1) Writers set up in their classrooms funtional and artistic writing communities like those in their out-of-school worlds.

2) They make the classroom safe both for emotional risktaking and for structural experimentation.

3) They interact with students as with fellow-writers.

4) They immerse students in creating, "experiencing," and distributing whole pieces of writing, not component parts.

5) They teach creative and expository writing similarly, claiming that the underlying processes are basically alike, though different forms emerge to accommodate differently shaped ideas.

6) Citing classroom evidence that all students can learn, they maintain high standards of quality for the writing all students do.

7) They encourage students to produce real writing, relying on intrinsic rewards to motivate and devising ingenious strategies to subvert the power of the grade.

8) Though they focus on the kinds of writing they themselves know best, writers training writers let students choose other forms.

9) They ignore barriers between student and real-world writers, bringing writers into the classroom, urging students into the world.

10) They help students improve their papers after weaknesses appear (whether problems stem from having too little to say, from inadequate control of form, from weak mechanical skills, or from misconceptions about how writing is done).

11) Expert practitioners also guide students' practice
   a. by modeling the whole process (from the search for ideas to the rewards that writing provides; from the need for feedback and support to strategies for dealing with criticism);
   b. by helping students find payoffs for writing;
   c. by helping students locate their best writing ideas;
   d. by helping students identify their own effective practices;
   e. by showing learners "how to do it";
   f. by "getting them to try it";
   g. by pointing out what is good and should be continued;
   h. by pointing out, clearly but matter of factly, exactly what needs improving; and
   i. by explaining how to make the weak parts strong.

12) Writers training writers are serious about writing, and that includes their students' writing as well.

13) And they disregard approaches, even those reported here, that aren't evident from their experience writing and learning to write.

Modeling after those who helped them with writing, writer-teachers demonstrate the motives, attitudes, processes, feelings, and values that accompany their work. Identifying with the stages of writers' development, they reject future-oriented instructional models, accept students where they are, eliminate tasks that many fail. In this way writers training writers avoid the failure and frustration of the instructional models and come to love their work. They think they are excellent writing teachers, and others (students, parents, colleagues, administrators, community members) think so too. As their influence spreads, some develop national reputations; many win statewide awards:

Georgia Association of Educators
Statewide Teacher of the Year Award, 1981—Cassandra;
Georgia Council of Teachers of English
Statewide Teacher of the Year Award, 1981—Tom;
Runner-up, 1981—Cassandra
Runner-up, 1980—Morty.

As the ripple effect of adopting the stance spreads, increasing self-esteem keeps expert-practitioners designing new courses (Cassandra), helping frustrated teachers (Cassandra, Barbara and Morty, Tom), presenting at national and statewide conferences (Cassandra, Barbara, Tom), giving district and regional workshops (Cassandra, Barbara and Morty, Tom),

developing outlets for student writing (Cassandra, Barbara and Morty, Tom), and publishing books and articles on how to teach (of the four, Cassandra alone has published only articles). Some serve as leaders in professional organizations; some publish student texts as well. But when professional opportunity threatens writing, a writer may choose between the two (Cassandra gave up advancement for stories she can work on in her classroom, writing with her students).

Refining the Conceptual Framework

Gary—a persistent anomaly. Gary was downright difficult to explain. Haaving published one book about his methods and contracted for another, he had received national recognition for his work. Later he mentioned other indicators of his success:

> Last year I had a chance to be chair of the English department at _____ State University, but that doesn't interest me. I love what I'm doing. Not like it, LOVE! I mean, to be able to have kids produce something and to know that it's because you taught them how to write, to interview, to deal with people. And for them to get in print and have an unbiased organization say they're the best in America—you know, that's achievement few people meet in a lifetime: I don't want to give it up [emphasis mine].

Though he reaped writer-teacher rewards, my ambivalence was strong; Gary didn't fit my category of "people who teach as they write." My dilemma was to discard an analysis I knew contained much truth or to alter it to account for Gary's case. Finally identifying the distinctive features of his success, I was able to do the latter.

The conjunction of three factors—innovative classroom approaches, implicit elitism, and experiential extra-curricular teaching—let Gary avoid the frustration and failure of other writer-schizophrenics. He earned his reputation (sponsoring a magazine like those he had worked on himself) "entirely after school"—when he was free to discard both grades and control of student learning. He expressed no open elitism, but as chair of his department, Gary scheduled himself only Honors and AP classes at the junior and senior levels. And because he adopted another writers' process-generated approach ("I use Ken Macrorie's style, pure and simple"), he experienced little failure despite a commitment to prepare students for college ("I think every kid in the AP Program should be able to deal with any college professor on any level") and to do "what I'm supposed to do" ("I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't enable

them to write a five-paragraph paper or a seven-paragraph one or to develop a thesis or a central idea"). Gary taught fitting ideas into traditional "composition" formulas after they were written, and his superior students could do so with ease ("I can get them to write any kind of writing. My problem with analysis is limiting them").

The emergent analysis. Gary's case illustrates the value of negative evidence and deliberately building contrasts into naturalistic designs: As is typical of anomalous cases, this one forced a substantial refinement in my framework (see Figure 4) which can now account for differences among writer-schizophrenics as well as between the paradigms. This excerpt, from an early write-up on teacher-writers, documents the emergence of these themes:

> As some students will write well whatever teachers do, teacher-writers hold high expectations for a few, interact with them as fellow-writers, and provide encouragement. them. Working individually or in small groups, often after school, they draw on intuitive knowledge of writing and what writers need to grow. The improvement and enthusiasm these good students show reinforce the belief that writers are born, not made, and insure a preference for older, high ability, or creative writing classes.
>
> Writer-schizophrenics teaching only such students enjoy rewards of expert practitioners: they feel successful, influence others, and enjoy their work. Still, "schizophrenia" shows up in elitist behavior, sometimes recognizable only by who and what they do not teach ("de facto elitism") rather than overt behavior, It may also show up in reliance on pre-teaching techniques (stages of the writing process, grammar, outlining, formulas, parts of the short story, etc.) which their able students master with ease or approximate intuitively.

Conclusions and Implications

In my fantasy, only writers teach writing. Free to teach as they wish, they succeed, and earn the status of experts for helping students learn. As virtually all students write competently, grades and ability grouping become unnecessary. Classes are heterogeneous so more experienced students can adopt the stance, modeling after their teachers and offering a pool of experience in each class. Beginning as full-time learners, students gradually adopt new roles to help less experienced students with writing. They earn repeated credit for writing workshops; and through the years, as interests and abilities change, they practice many forms. Because only writers teach writing, the need for specialized teacher training has decreased. Teachers are appointed on the basis of their experience—writing and helping others in the expert-practitioner role.

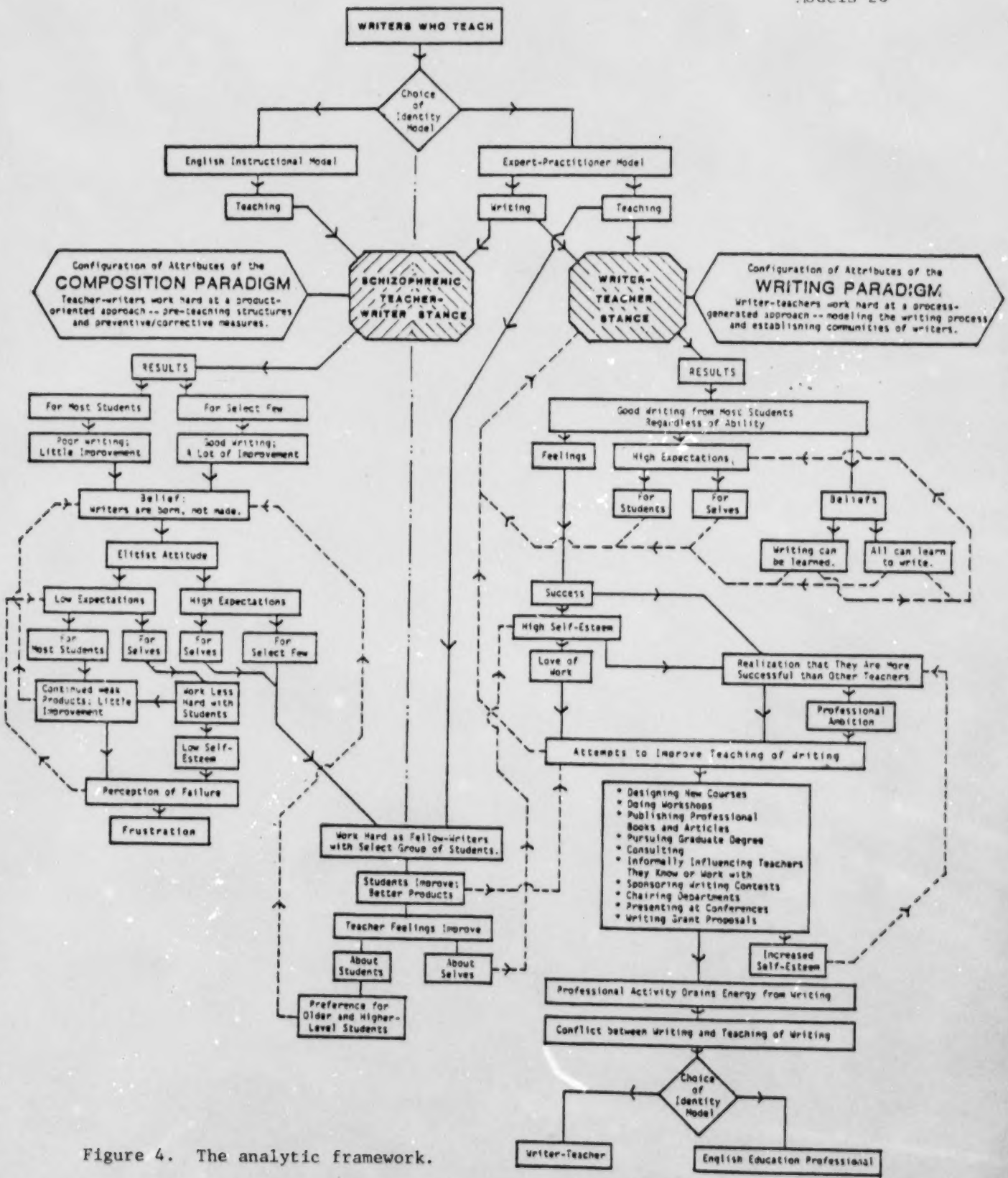


Figure 4. The analytic framework.

Unfortunately this fantasy has little reality in contemporary schools where the composition paradigm perpetuates itself. Other than hiring writers and letting them teach as they wish, what can be done to improve this situation? Three things must happen in classrooms for all students to learn to write. Teachers must get rid of the goals, the assumptions, the content, the methods, amd the values of the composition paradigm. They must develop themselves as writers to adopt a writer-training-writers stance. And they must take a not-so-dangerous "risk"—bridging the paradigm gap. True, it may be some time before enough good models exist, and the transition for non-writers who teach will be hard. But until writing teachers learn to look at themselves as writers and to adopt the writer's point of view, they can begin to pattern their teaching on a writing-workshop model, building communities in their classrooms and offering assignments real writers do. Equally important, they can share their writing with students and assume that all can learn.

For teachers as for student writers, valid models are the key, so the implications for teacher training are the same. Teacher-educators must develop themselves as writers, examine their assumptions, and begin to model for teachers the expert-pracitioners stance. And they too must defy the composition tradition, as the stance implies. In short, they must offer writers as models for teachers and students alike.

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